

Virgin Resistance: How Shakespeare's Youthful Virgins Complicate Plot, Sexuality, and  
Language

Research Thesis

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~INTRODUCTION~

Within one of the first scenes in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Lavatch tells the Countess of Roussillon: “I have been, madam, a wicked creature, as you—and all flesh and blood—are, and indeed I do marry that I may repent” (1.3.30-32).<sup>1</sup> In other words, Lavatch means to marry so as to escape the damning nature of his sexual desire. But knowing Lavatch, it’s really just a loophole—sex can’t be considered deviant, if one is sanctimoniously married to their spouse. Especially if said-marriage leads to the reproduction of children, which ultimately has the true power to sanctify the soul. And while Lavatch may be utilizing marriage as an excuse for his illicit sexuality, St. Paul earnestly describes this very idea when he writes that “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were [their] children unclean; but now are they holy.”<sup>2</sup> Paul, like Lavatch, argues that even if husband and wife are ‘unbelieving’ when they marry, they are sanctified and redeemed through their union. Because if this union was not consecrated by marriage, children—such as those born out of wedlock or sexually illicit acts—could be born with ‘unclean’ souls. Hence, the idea of ‘union’ is significant enough that even the sexually irresponsible Lavatch takes note of its importance. Perhaps part of this reason results from marital unions in Shakespeare’s time being seen as the act of husband and wife literally becoming ‘owned’ by one another. As Paul further writes, “the wife hath not the power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not the power of his own body, but the wife.”<sup>3</sup> This is a fairly interesting idea that Paul seems to be communicating. As the language points to a notion that one’s body is no longer their own. And while the scripture is woven with regard for how the ‘union’ of husband and wife

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<sup>1</sup> This and all other future Shakespeare quotations are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 7:14. Taken from the Geneva Bible (1599).

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 7:4.

is meant to be seen—a mess of equal flesh, power, and sanctity—Paul does little to speak of how this husband-wife amalgamation functions outside of the ‘union.’ In other words, how must they function within social society?

Described more broadly by Theodora Jankowski, these entities of husband-wife are ‘binaries,’ in that “they become social structures of normalcy.”<sup>4</sup> In this way, married couples are not a unified creation of equal flesh and power, ‘husband-wife,’ but a bound, hegemonic structure of ‘husband/wife.’ Though Jankowski’s husband/wife binary is accurate, I propose a more radical position that this early modern binary would be ‘man/wife,’ in that men were inextricably bound to the social image of wives. To be a ‘man’ in early modern society, one had to own land, obtain a wife, and produce offspring. This meant that those who were not able to financially marry due to lack of resources or income, were not truly considered men. As Jennifer Higginbotham points out, it wasn’t just in terms of socio-economic status that men came to represent the “dominative” gender. In linguistic studies, men came to be definitively known as the ‘universal,’ or the idea that ‘man’ could (and still does) connote “humanity in general or a male human being.”<sup>5</sup> Men came to denote linguistic generalizations and points of reference within the early modern era, while women were meant to be points of difference (or, the development of the Other).<sup>6</sup> To be distinguished as a ‘woman,’ was to be subservient to ‘generalized’ masculine counterparts. Women were usually distinguished in terms of their fungibility: how they could be bought and sold through dowries, what their husbands gained in social value as a result of their marriage, and of course, the reproduction of an heir to both inherit

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<sup>4</sup> Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pg. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pg. 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley, “Difference and Dominance: An Overview of Language, Gender, and Society,” in Thorne and Henley (eds), *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1975), pg. 15.

and continue this economy of women. This male-dominated, economic cycle is related to the fairly simplistic ‘tripartite model’ of female development: “the categories of ‘maid,’ ‘wife,’ and ‘widow.’”<sup>7</sup> However, Higginbotham offers an alternative to this model by using the unique category of ‘girl’ which props the model onto something other than fixed stages and opens up the possibility of ‘continuous’ female development.

Jankowski seems to coincide with Higginbotham in arguing that there is also a certain ‘continuous’ quality to virginity in early modern culture, when she writes that “any early modern Protestant virgin who chose to unduly prolong her virginity—or especially to adopt a permanent condition...had no place in the sex/gender system.”<sup>8</sup> The idea of virgins having ‘no place’ within society marks them as liminal and in many ways not human. Jankowski further attributes this inhuman quality of virgins to their inability to ‘fit’ into the ‘husband/wife’ binary.<sup>9</sup> A good example is Paroles’ ‘vendible virginity’ speech to Helen in *All’s Well*, as he says, “He that hangs himself is a virgin: virginity murders itself, and should be buried in highways, out of all sanctified limit, a desperate offendress against nature” (1.1.129-132). If the virgin never yields children (and therefore, does not have sex), Paroles seems to think it ‘murders itself.’ This relies on the fact that the value of virginity was ‘losing’ her virginity; if she didn’t lose it—what was the point? But before the Protestant Reformation, these ‘offendress’ virgins were allowed to be an extant class of society through religious life by taking a vow of celibacy. This is what Jankowski labels as the ‘queer virgin’<sup>10</sup> because these virgins were able to be sexually deviant by the mere fact that they didn’t have sex. As radical as that sounds, when the Reformation did begin, monasteries were torn down, and Catholic religious life was burned at the stake. It wasn’t

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<sup>7</sup> Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters*, pg. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, pg. 113.

<sup>9</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, pg. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, pg. 9.

exactly a safe time for these older sexual virgins to be protesting their stolen right of virginity. However, Nuns and Sisters of Christ aren't the focus of my study, but rather I'm interested in looking at the upended, confusing, and in-between spaces virgins occupy. And when used in the right ways could acted as forms of resistance against the patriarchal norms of society.

It was the liminal, undefined boundaries of virgins that allowed them to be seen as *tabula rasa*—they were dangerous, mystical entities that carried empires and legacies within them. There was potential, there was danger, and it was terrifying to social society. Quite frankly, it seems as if early modern society didn't know what else to do with these unstable social entities of womanly flesh except to 'control' them. One has to wonder, did the 'maids' of early modern society see themselves as 'mythic' vessels? Did they have a sense of themselves? And in what ways? I argue that they did through what I call 'virgin consciousness.'

Within the early modern era, there was an understanding that 'selves' (that is, the so-called 'mind-body connection) was not permanent *or* fixed. Even the aspects of physical, reproductive bodies, as Thomas Laqueur suggests, were not 'hardened' within physical sex, so much as they were thought to be part of the "one-sex model."<sup>11</sup> The masculine penis, testicles, and scrotum were thought to be simply the physical result of the 'active' energy of male bodies, versus that of the 'passive' female body which housed an inverted penis (the vagina). Laqueur posits then that it wasn't strange to hear accounts of women seeking medical advice on the sudden appearance of a penis-like appendage, or that a man's pectorals had begun 'lactating.'<sup>12</sup> Early modern 'theoretical'<sup>13</sup> physicians would have chalked it up as the over-influx of a

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Laqueur, "Of Language and Flesh," in *Making Sex: Body Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 8-9. However, it's important to note, Laqueur, for as reputable as he is—poses challenges to us. Laqueur is, as Peter Cryle states, "interested in knowing what 'it's all about.' He can take a totalistic view, as he does above in my own research, which can limit the historic era. For more on Cryle, see "Interrogating the Work of Thomas W. Laqueur," *Sexualities* 4, no. 12 (2009): pg. 412.

<sup>12</sup> Laqueur, "Of Language and Flesh," pg. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Gail Kern Paster, "Introduction," in *Humoring The Body*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9.

particular bodily humor—blood, choler, black bile, or phlegm. It was also believed, in Galenic perspective, that the very ‘air’ of the environment someone breathed, had an effect on the way their humors and passions (their emotions) functioned. Gail Kern Paster, in *Humoring the Body*, extensively studies how “we [in the modern era] tend not to imagine the emotions ... as part of the fabric of the body”<sup>14</sup> whereas, Renaissance bodies were thought to be in a state of flux: ‘goosey,’ liquidized, and positively, undefined. Thus, there was a need and a reaching eagerness for control of both one’s self and of *others*.

With this in mind, if one could view themselves as a ‘definitive shape,’ Stephen Greenblatt in *Self-Fashioning* points out one could also view others as ‘definitive shapes.’<sup>15</sup> with this idea of non-definitive bodies and minds, constantly being reworked and ‘re-fashioned,’ restructured and renewed, there is an opening of grand possibility of ‘more in heaven and earth than are dreamt in philosophy.’ However, even as this ideology is an enlivening idea of the early modern world, it is also one that can prove to be faulty and deceitful. Because if bodies and minds could *naturally* shape themselves in such odd, yet meaningful ways, what happens when it is an “intentional fashioning” of one’s own self?<sup>16</sup> Or, even more threatening, an intentional refashioning of another? As Greenblatt cautions us, it is a “power that is creative as well as destructive, but that is scarcely wholly disinterested and benign.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, rarely was one who possessed the power to ‘fashion’ others interested in being ‘benign.’ However, as one can gather from Shakespeare’s most manipulative characters, such as Iago in *Othello*, an eagerness and lack of caution in shaping how the ‘self’ is seen, can lead to tragic consequence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Paster, “Intro,” pg. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pg. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, pg. 227.

<sup>17</sup> Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, pg. 228.

<sup>18</sup> Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, pg. 228.

However, to be cautious, to be smart with this authority, and to fashion the shapes of bodies and minds, is to successfully *recreate* that person. In this way, if virgins were aware of their subordinate, unnatural state within patriarchal society, are there instances where they utilize Greenblatt's 'self-fashioning' to recreate the patriarchal norms? In other words, do they *intentionally* re-fashion their own identity ('virgin-fashioning'), as a form of resistance against the passive role they were confined to? And in ways that could also 'refashion' how the 'active role' within the binary should be seen? If that's the case, then it effectively flips the early modern binary of 'man/wife' to 'virgin/man.'

Within this thesis, I intend to do two things: one is to address how Shakespeare seems especially interested in this question of the 'virgin consciousness,' and what happens when 'virgins' take advantage of their 'idealized' state and 'refashion' the system. Secondly, I intend to make the argument that Shakespeare could have seen these women—Helen within *All's Well That Ends Well*, Anne Page in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Rosalind in *As You Like It*—as these vessels: conscious and capable of active resistance against patriarchal norms.

#### ~HELEN: THE MASTERMIND~

Shakespeare's Helen from *All's Well That Ends Well*—written with the narrative of the 'poor physician's daughter'—seems like she fits the archetype of the early modern 'lovesick virgin' struck with the woes of unrequited love, and desiring strictly to marry. She spends most of the first act pining over Bertram, despite the recent death of her father. As she says, 'I think not on my father, / Than those [tears] I shed for him. What was he like? / I have forgot him. My imagination carries on favor in't but Bertram's. / I am undone" (1.1.74-79). It would be easy to write these lines off simply as the stereotypical pining of Shakespeare's 'lovesick characters,' if

it were not for her mentioning the idea of ‘memory.’ Garrett Sullivan—in “Forgetting, Memory, and Identity in *All’s Well That Ends Well*”—argues that in the early modern era the ‘making of memory’ and the ‘act of forgetting’ were not separate processes, but relied on one another for proper cognitive function. In fact, the threat of forgetting was “a force which memory [utilized to] produce itself.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in order to ‘not’ forget, it was understood that judgment, reason, and rationalization all relied upon the ideology that if one could ‘sense’ the environment around her, she would not forget.<sup>20</sup> This proto-empirical perception is what matters in context to memory; as long as one could ‘perceive,’ then one could ‘conceptualize.’ In this way, it is not that Helen has forgotten her father, but rather her perception of him. Because as we learn from the Countess earlier in the scene, Helen’s conceptualization of her father (and of herself), was closely tied to his ‘base role’ as a physician. But with the death of her father and the loss of his conceptualization as ‘base’ and ‘poor,’ Helen’s understanding of social hierarchy and her place within it, has become ‘undone.’ In a manner of speaking, Helen is free to ascend, move about higher social spaces, and rewrite the ‘poor physician’s daughter’ narrative given to her.

This is why the central romantic conflict of the play arises: Helen ‘perceives’ Bertram. More specifically, she has imagined him not as he truly is (a snotty French aristocrat), but rather how he is ‘favorable’ to her in this new social world. In this way, it is not only that Helen’s perceptions can transgress social standing, but that she seems to muddy the difference between what is actually “there” and what she herself perceives. In a sense, she reimagines him in her preferred image. This is a powerful tool as it enables her to create distinction and nuance where they might not exist. However, this tool of ‘reimagining’ that Helen possesses could also be self-

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<sup>19</sup> Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., ““Be this sweet Helen’s knell, and now forget her’: Forgetting, Memory, and Identity in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” in *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pg. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Sullivan, “Forgetting, Memory, and Identity in *All’s Well*, pg. 55.



damaging. If Helen is not capable of controlling her imagined perception of both people and her environment, then a disconnect can (and does, as I will discuss later) occur between the two spheres of perception. After all, too much time spent in suspended liminal perception can result in what Galen called ‘phrenitis’—also known as the melancholy-humored ‘lovesickness.’ Fortunately, Helen—who, at the beginning of the play, still recognizes the importance of being rooted within her original middleclass standing—is not one to be tangled up in her false perceptions. Instead, all of this perceiving and conceptualizing on Helen’s behalf points to an aggressive virgin consciousness that enables her to formulate and plan:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie  
Which we ascribe to heaven ...  
Impossible be strange attempts to those  
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose  
What hath been cannot be. Who ever strove  
To show her merit that did miss her love?  
The King’s disease—my project may deceive me,  
But my intents are fixed and will not leave me (1.1.99-200, 207-212).

Aside from Helen’s typical wishful thinking, this is the speech where Helen decides to be her own ‘remedy,’ to make ‘possible’ that which is ‘impossible,’ and to heal the King of France. And let’s not forget, it’s all in the name of her love for one man. It’s a lovely brazen notion, you have to give her that, but her idea also seems to point to an awareness of her own ability to ‘fashion’ plot. Hence, why Greenblatt’s ‘self-fashioning’ is a method Helen utilizes. As she has already proven, she can rewrite the conditions of her own social class perception (*self-fashioning*), but she can also reimagine both the perception of others and the sequence of plot (‘*virgin-fashioning*’). In this particular instance, Helen cites a ‘project,’ which ultimately, she implies will involve the ‘diseased King.’ Whether or not her ‘project’ implies she means to heal him is not yet clear, but it does point to Helen’s awareness of herself within this play. She

intends to carry out an action—‘her intents are fixed and will not leave her’—and while it could ‘deceive her,’ it is clear she has fashioned a deliberate purpose for herself. In doing so, we are given proof that Helen has a plan in mind or at least the intention to craft one.

And while Helen’s 1.1 speech does not clearly tell us she intends to heal the King, we are aware she intends to make him part of her ‘self-fashioned’ plan by utilizing her father’s ‘effects.’ As Helen confesses to her step-mother, along with the intention to go to Paris, that her father, Gerard, “left [her] some prescriptions / Of rare and proved effects, such as his reading, / And manifest experience had collected / For general sovereignty” (1.3.207-210). And while she goes on to mention that her father cautioned her about using such powerful ‘effects,’ Helen believes that among Gerard’s readings, “there is a remedy, approved, set down” to cure the King (1.3.214). By establishing that ‘honest’ Helen has a special connection with her deceased father, and having her take on his role as a physician, it appears Shakespeare is implying something more about Helen, than he is about the so-called ‘remedy’ she is speaking of. After all, this is the first time we’re hearing of Gerard actually having anything to pass down to Helen, and this idea of ‘remedies’ and ‘rare prescriptions’ ties into the idea of what I call the ‘virgin mystic.’ Katherine Goodland defines this idea best when she proposes that virgins within medieval and early modern texts are often seen as “as caretakers of the body, interpreters of the meaning of death, and embodiments of the communal memory [who] were believed to harmonize human experience with the cycles of nature and otherworldly power.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, while we have the understanding that Helen’s social perception has been undone by her father’s death, it also seems that in creating this juxtaposition of her as both a ‘caretaker of the body’ and an ‘interpreter of death,’ Helen is the ‘new’ Gerard. In the act of dying, Gerard has “passed” his

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<sup>21</sup> Katherine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From Raising Lazarus to King Lear*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), pg. 9-10.

knowledge to Helen—the virginal figure—and she now remains the ‘embodiment’ of his ‘communal memory.’ It is no wonder she can’t remember him—she has *become* her father.

Now, if by embodying her father’s memory she becomes him, Helen then becomes the physician her father was, creating yet another binary, one that Jankowski would be proud of; women, but more specifically virgins, are seen as both ‘life-givers’ and ‘ministers of death.’ This idea is further strengthened in 2.1, when we see Helen has reappeared in Paris to meet with the French King, she is once again coated in this language of the ‘virgin mystic.’ As the King of France says, “Thou this to hazard needs must intimate / Skill infinite, or monstrous desperate. / Sweet practiser, thy physic I will try, / That ministers thine own if I die.” Helen agrees: “Not helping, death’s my fee” (2.1.182-185, 188). There are two important things that happen within this scene and this particular context. The first being that the King, in the aforementioned lines, confirms Helen as the ‘practiser’ of life, but he also identifies her as a minister of his death. With this in mind, the King illustrates another part of Goodland’s argument that “women’s privileged access to the dead appears to derive from their biological role as life-givers.”<sup>22</sup> And while Helen does seem to have a certain undeniable ‘mysticism’ about her, perhaps what the King and other characters perceive as mystical is actually a strong sense of the metaphysical world around her.

In fact, what the text seems to consider preternatural in Helen’s virginity, I would propose falls back onto her ‘proto-empirical’ perception. Empiricists observe the natural world and come to understand their perceptions about the world based on those observations. It was already understood that empirical physicians before Descartes ‘thought and therefore was’ were seen as frauds as they “hailed from lower social classes and had less formal education.”<sup>23</sup> And this association with lower classes that was often seen as feminine. Sara Luttfring makes the

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<sup>22</sup> Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*, pg. 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> *The Norton Shakespeare*, pg. 482.

connection based on the deep-seeded practice of ‘household physic,’ in which women “were the most common unlicensed medical practitioners,”<sup>24</sup> as it was often the case that they were the *only* available practitioners. In this way, Helen—a virgin, who ‘hails’ from a lower social class—can directly be placed within this category of these early, female (or, feminized) empiricists. However, Shakespeare has made Helen distinct from these other household empiricists, because not only does she possess the ability to observe her environment, she has an intense awareness of it. Where other empiricists deduce conclusions from their observations, Helen’s conclusions ‘fashion’ the substance and people around her. More specifically, perhaps the reason as to why she generates such mythic imagery based on her medicinal craft, is due to the understanding that she presents herself as an ontologist—one who is able to rationalize both the physical and the unseen.

Therefore, it would be this ontological quality about Helen that allows her to slip through the text both unseen and undetected as she plans and plots her projections throughout the play. Marjorie Garber calls this ‘unseen’ ineffability of characters within Shakespeare’s plays the ‘unscene,’ which sets out to “describe the indescribable...leaving the actual words and gestures of the participants to the audience’s imagination, while vividly underscoring the emotional significance of what has taken place.”<sup>25</sup> And while Garber is onto something in describing how the ‘unseen’ can be seen, she utilizes examples of characters throughout Shakespeare’s texts that speak of an ‘unscene.’ For instance, she points to Ophelia’s description of the disgruntled Hamlet when he appears to her “as if he had been loosed from hell” (2.1.84). But there is a difference between ‘unseen’ parts of the texts that can be described by other characters and what remains

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<sup>24</sup> Sara Luttfring, *Bodies, Speech, and Reproductive Knowledge in Early Modern England*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), pg. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Marjorie Garber, “‘The Rest Is Silence’: Ineffability and the ‘Unscene’ in Shakespeare’s Plays,” in *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett*, (New York: AMS Press, 1984), pg. 43.

robustly undescribed within the text. Robyn Warhol describes this as being called ‘unnarration,’ in which the text, at least to our knowledge, “describes passages that didn’t happen.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, it seems rather apt that Helen who sees her own social perception as confounded, can be found within this undefined space between these two concepts—the ‘unnarrated’ and the ‘unscene.’ Because on one hand, while we see Helen describe her intention and awareness to ‘fashion’ plot, we rarely catch sight of her actual thought process.

This would also explain why we are not given a scene within the text where Helen ‘cures’ the French King. While it’s obvious at the start of 2.3 when the King reappears with Helen in the royal court that he is miraculously cured, there is no textual evidence to imply there was a ‘healing scene.’ And in applying this theory of the ‘unscene unnarrative’ to Helen, it raises a question of truth. As we must acknowledge that she has an uncanny ability to shape, change, and ‘fashion’ her perception onto the plot of the play. Helen herself even tells us (and the King) in 2.1, “Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand / What husband in thy power I will command” (2.1.192-193). Helen demonstrates a powerful consistency in this scene: she fashioned a plot in 1.1, carried it with her into the ‘unscene unnarrative’ of the play, and now, means to carry it out with her ‘healing’ of the King. And perhaps one would be more willing to accept that she does physically heal him, if Shakespeare had been so kind as to include it. But given that we do not have the physical ‘healing scene,’ I dare to ask: does she truly cure the King? Or just change his perception of his illness to get what she wants?

However, just because something does not appear in textual representation does not mean that it didn’t happen. Helen herself is proof of that as she moves through the text with ease. Put in this way, perhaps the question is not—does she ‘cure’ the King?—but rather the question

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<sup>26</sup> Robyn Warhol, “Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film” in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pg. 229.

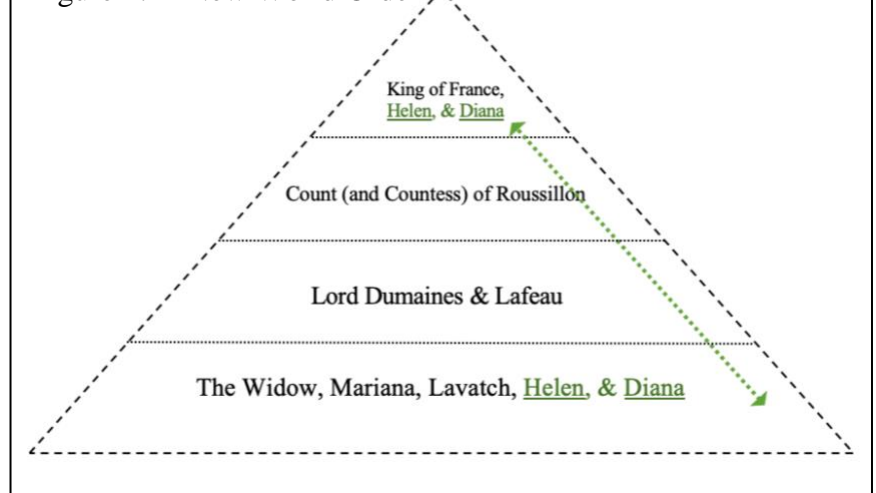
raises the significance of the ‘cure.’ If there is no record of a scene within the play text, perhaps it was not important as to *how* it happened, just that it did. And this message of ‘it doesn’t matter how it happens, just that it does,’ is the beating heart of this play; ‘all’s well that ends well,’ right? A notion that is further strengthened in the following scene between Helen and the King in 2.3. The King, having been cured along with his ‘preserver,’ reappears to the royal court of France as he and Helen dance, sit side-by-side, and playfully banter. And as promised, the King offers her choice among the four suitors he brings forth—“who shuns thy love shuns all his love in me” (2.3.70)—all of whom Helen rejects until she chooses Bertram: “I give me and my service ever whilst I live” (2.3.99). It’s hard to discount the obvious of the scene: Helen has spurned all of the King’s suitable picks, and instead, has chosen her own in Bertram. In the same way as the cure, Helen has gone a roundabout way to marry the man she desires. It would seem we are faced with a radical theme: the ‘mean’ is not really important to ‘end.’ One that the King, in 2.3, seems to emphasize when he asserts to Bertram: “’Tis only title thou disdain’st in her, the which / I can build up. Strange is it that our bloods, / Of colour, weight, and heat, poured all together, / Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off / In differences so mighty” (2.3.113-117). The King implies that title—perhaps the most identifying feature of humans in the early modern era—can function as a commodity, an additive substance, rather than something that one is born into. In creating a ‘confounding’ association between physical title and physical blood and flesh, the King lessens the importance of title to something so nondistinctive that it could be easily added to a ‘maiden’s head.’

In a sense, the King is threatening to reverse one of the most commonly understood notions of Elizabethan culture: title can now be reversed. Bertram, alarmed by this concept, speaks out against the King’s plan to raise Helen’s social status: “But follows it, my lord, to

bring me down / Must answer for my raising?" (2.3.108-109). And it does seem strange that Bertram, who has gone to Paris to strengthen his reputation and better his 'name,' is alarmed by Helen's prospect of a raise in society. Bertram does not see Helen's gain of title and 'social weight' as an influence of the King, but rather an invasion of Helen's social influence. As he adds thereafter: "She had her breeding at my father's charge. / A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain / Rather corrupt me ever!" As vile and indignant as his vitriol sounds, it does have a certain ring of truth. If the King raises Helen as Bertram's equal, then he is misplaced in the social order, and as a result, brought down in the process. The thing is, he's not entirely wrong. In healing the King with her father's 'effects,' it seems that Helen has inadvertently reversed the patriarchal order of the play. With the masculine figure of Bertram beneath her, she's misplaced the social roles, leaving herself (and the other major virgin of the text, Diana) to not only belong

beside the social height of the King, but to permeate each social climate in odd and unique ways. And as we learned through the death of Helen's father, she has no issue subsuming the 'place' of other masculine characters. This does not necessarily mean that Helen has 'become' the

Figure 1: A New World Order



King as she has 'become' her father, but that she has 'fashioned' a condition in which virgins can come to "exist" beside him. As Figure 1 shows us, Helen is *not* the King, but a pervasive presence amongst the echelons of social order. She can both exist on the continuum of her 'middling class,' but also ascend to the highest levels of power in monarchy. Hence, why

Bertram is so quick to reject both the King and Helen's proposition to marriage, while the other characters seemingly accept Helen's existence within their social sphere, Bertram adamantly refuses as he knows she has come to rise above him in social influence. Nevertheless, the King forcibly tells him to either marry Helen or he "will throw [Bertram] from [his] care for ever" (2.3.158). Bertram instantly relents and submits to the proposal.

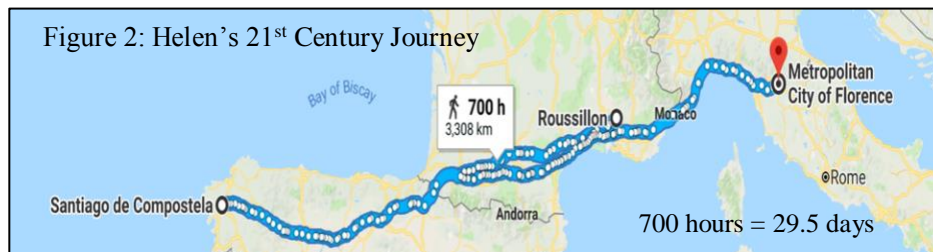
It is at this point, with Helen 'above' Bertram (and the other masculine characters), that the binary between 'man/woman' has switched to 'virgin/man.' This is only further accentuated in 3.2 when Bertram runs off to the war in Florence, but leaves a letter to his mother, the Countess of Roussillon that says: "'I have sent you a daughter-in-law. She hath recovered the King and undone me. I have wedded her, not bedded her, and sworn to make the 'not' eternal'" (3.2.19-21). It's striking immature language, especially from one so esteemed as Bertram. But it seems as if his contemptuous language goes along with his forced social demotion. As it is written in prose, *not* in courtly verse, the Count's letter also points to his belief in the strict physical doctrine of marriage: validity only comes through consummation. The particular line of 'daughter-in-law,' makes it seem like Helen is a monstrous entity. He doesn't call her 'his wife,' he says he's 'sworn to make the 'not' eternal.' In punning on the idea of the 'wedding knot,' 'not' in this sense implies a perpetual resistance to Helen, as well as an implication of her hindrance to him. Since Helen is *not* able to change past these conditions he has laid down, she is an eternal "daughter-in-law," as in the law she is wedded to Bertram, but she is not his *wife*, until 'he has bedded her.'

This condition still fits into Jankowski's binary of 'husband/wife,' but Helen is not yet a woman. If she were, perhaps she would be able to fit into a societal category, but in being a virgin (and thus, an unstable entity of social order), Helen—as well as Diana—remains above



Bertram. Therefore, while Jankowski's binary remains intact, my proposed virgin/man binary also seems to be taking effect. Even so, it is also in 3.2 that Helen discovers, via her own letter from Bertram, the awful proposition that until she "canst get the ring upon [Bertram's] finger ... and show [him] a child begotten of [her] body that [he is] father to," then, and only then, "[can she] call [him] husband" (3.2.55-57). It's a cold move. But when we think about how Helen possesses an unstoppable ability to ontologically make connections between both the 'physical' and the 'unseen,' as well as dissolve social structure and coexist on multiple levels of class and distinction, then this is really the only way Bertram can stop her. Because as we know, Bertram thinks of 'sex' as the key factor to marriage, and unfortunately, there is no way to bypass that. However, as 3.2 progresses, Helen is very silent during the remainder of this scene, only interrupting her ruminating silence to reread Bertram's letter: "'Till I have no wife, I have nothing in France.' 'Tis bitter" (72-73). And while the Countess attempts to comfort her, having known Helen's feelings for her son were real, Helen remains strangely unresponsive. When the Countess does exit, Helen finally breaks her nearly 100-line silence with a short soliloquy: "'Till I have no wife I have nothing in France.' Nothing in France until he has no wife. Thou shalt have none, Roussillon, none in France; / Then thou hast all again ... I will be gone" (99-102, 126). It seems as if Helen gets the message, right? Leave France, Bertram can go home. Although we have to remember, Helen exists both within visible scenes and 'unscene unnarratives.' While Helen seems to understand that Bertram is obviously writing to insist he'll never come home, her long upended silences and repeated uses of the same phrase— 'till I have no wife, I have nothing in France'—imply the ineffability of thought. Conscious of the space she exists, Helen seems to be 'fashioning' yet another plot.

In 3.4, it is revealed Helen has left to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella in Spain. She leaves a letter, much like Bertram, to her mother-in-law, but unlike Bertram, hers is written in iambic verse. She claims she's going on a voyage in an attempt to 'mend her faults,' 'sanctify Bertram's name,' and ultimately, 'to set him free' of her. But, as we know, in the very next scene of 3.5, Helen appears in Florence. Given what the map tells us in Figure 2, it's highly improbable that Helen went to Spain, only to turn around and



walk back through Florence. One is inclined to question the validity of Helen's 'pilgrimage': did

she really ever mean to go to Spain? Or, if she did, it seems there is a large block of time that is unaccounted for. As a modern map quest can show, it would take about a month to travel on foot from Roussillon, France to Santiago de Compostela, Spain to Florence, Italy. And while there has been dispute over whether Helen actually intended to go to Spain or not,<sup>27</sup> the reasoning is not clear. But it does seem strange that when we leave Helen at the end of 3.4, she seems to be surmising her next move. What's more is that Florence is where Bertram is stationed as a Captain. It seems only fair that we entertain the notion that she came to Florence to attempt to change her state as the 'unbedded' wife.

While her purpose for being there is not entirely clear, it seems it is only through luck that at the start of 3.5, she comes across Diana, the Widow (Diana's mother), and Mariana. Before Helen enters, Mariana is in the process of warning Diana to be careful of Bertram and the

<sup>27</sup> Richard Wilson, "To Great St Jaques Bound: *All's Well That Ends Well* In Shakespeare's Europe," in *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, (Paris: University of Paris Press, 2005), pg. 273-290. Wilson argues that Helen was on an *actual* pilgrimage and made a round-about effort in returning to France.

other French soldiers' sexual ingenuity because "the honor of a maid is in her name, and no legacy is so rich as honesty" (3.5.11-12). Mariana's short, but sweet line of verse is interesting in that it encourages us to see that virgins have a so-called 'legacy.' And while unwedded virgins usually came "packaged" with a form of 'commercial legacy' (i.e., a dowry), Mariana's use of the term 'maid' is particularly interesting in that it connotes 'service' and labor. As Higginbotham states in my Introduction, different words—referring to the youthful virgins—could mean different things depending on the context. She also makes note of the fact that the word 'maid' "defined single women as servants or virgins (or both); 'maid' carried with it social directive that all unmarried women should be virgins."<sup>28</sup> In other words, although the categories of class and distinction between these 'virgin words' were often ambiguously unstable, it seems like Mariana in using 'maid' is intentionally committing Diana to a life of service as an indentured virgin. With this in mind, the meaning of Mariana's warning becomes a bit unclear. On one hand, Mariana could be implying that Diana protect her 'honesty' as a form of service to her future husband—as there was no greater service a 'maiden' could supply than her 'honesty.' Or perhaps, given that Helen has switched the play's binary to virgin/man, Mariana argues that in keeping herself 'honest,' Diana's role as a virgin is as much a valid, valued role as anything else.

Mariana's warning seems to echo throughout the last two acts of the play, as protecting a virgin's 'honesty' becomes an actual plot Helen utilizes to conspire against her husband. As in 3.7, Helen and the Widow (Diana's mother) have secretly met to 'fashion' a plot to steal Bertram's dynastic ring, consummate her marriage to him, and conceive of his child. And we have to hand it to Shakespeare, the scene powerfully uses symbolism. Especially, when we

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<sup>28</sup> Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*, pg. 25.

consider how Helen, in stealing (and wearing) Bertram's ring— "that downward hath succeeded in his house / From son to son, some four or five descents / Since the first father wore it" (3.7.23-25)—would literally stick a finger right through the middle of a masculine orifice. That may be why Shakespeare chose a ring to identify with Bertram in order to pun on the idea that women can cleverly 'poke holes' through male-dominated spaces. Even those as tightly-knitted as well-off French dynasties. And while this idea may seem a bit far-fetched (as symbolism can be), it is only far-fetched until we consider that Helen, in this scene, literally 'fashions' a Garber-esque 'unscene':

It is no more  
But that your daughter ere she seems as won  
Desires this ring; appoints him an encounter;  
In fine, delivers me to the fill the time,  
Herself most chastely absent. After,  
To marry her I'll add three thousand crowns  
To what is passed already (3.7.3-37).

Granted, Helen's plot is not a description of a scene in the past, but rather, a projection of a scene in the future; one that takes place in a male-dominated space (much like Bertram's ring), reimagined by the mind of a virgin. By fashioning an 'unscene'—that is, the 'bedroom' of Bertram—Helen recreates the scenario in which male heirs are conceived. In the process, she reorders the act of consummation between husband and wife in her image. Helen has planned, plotted, and fashioned a way to not only protect her 'honesty,' but also Diana's. In fact, this textual image also seems to imply not only consummation between Bertram and Helen, but a contractual 'marriage'—not unlike Helen and Bertram's—between Diana and Helen (as she resolves to 'marry her' and 'add three thousand crowns' to her dowry). Therefore, this 'unscene' allows us to imagine a female-dominated space that has been created, set down, and made to reverse the way in which masculine heirs are conceived. Thus, Helen (and Diana) reinforce the

concept of the virgin/man binary. As they become a sort of ‘playwright,’ with Bertram as the locus of their plot, they set out to teach him a lesson about his sexual indiscretion.

Ultimately, by 5.3, it seems like the Widow, Helen, and Diana’s plot to overthrow Bertram’s feckless sexual nature is successful. As Diana—appearing before the royal court to show Bertram’s ring upon her finger—describes yet another ‘unscene,’ but this one, unlike Helen’s projected ‘unscene,’ remains in the past:

Though yet he never harmed me, here I quit him.  
 He knows himself in my bed he hath defiled,  
 And at the time he got his wife with child.  
 So there’s my riddle; one that’s dead is quick.  
 And now behold the meaning (5.3.296-298, 300-301).

In recreating the scene of Helen’s conception of Bertram’s child, Diana cleverly points to the instability of virgins’ roles within this play. Being permeable entities of social perception, as well as ‘honest’ servants to their function as ‘maidens,’ Helen and Diana can interchangeably replace one another. It seems that in playing to Mariana’s ‘stereotypical role’ of the ‘maiden’—an ‘honest,’ indentured servant of her own virginity—Helen and Diana have smartly created distinction between one another. Helen, “by dying,” has been recreated with the pregnant body that houses Bertram’s child. Even though she is no longer a fixture of ambivalent virginity, it is through her own self-fashioning and virgin-fashioning that Helen has recreated the conditions of Bertram’s pact. She has gotten his ring through Diana, conceived his child within a space she shaped, and returned to France as his clearly-consummated ‘wife.’

Although Helen was successful in attaining her marriage, the question remains: does the virgin/man binary shift to man/wife, now that Helen is properly married? I would argue that that is not the case for the base reason that Helen’s ‘physical’ body has simply been ‘refashioned’ by her virgin identity. The entirety of the play is, in a sense, shaped by this virgin. She is born into a

‘middling’ class but, consciously aware that she exists within her own permeable space, brainstorms an idea to marry Bertram—a man who is well-above her in social distinction. This comes in the form of healing the King, who will allow her to choose her own husband no matter the social class. And after facing rejection from her chosen-husband, she simply reorients herself to the new conditions posed against her: she needs his ring, she needs to consummate her marriage, and she needs his baby. By enlisting the help of Diana and the Widow, Helen succeeds, possessing all that she needed to be ‘properly’ considered Bertram’s wife. But that is why she isn’t part of the man/wife binary, because *she*—bright, glorious Helen—has created her own pregnant body. In a way, Helen has always been ‘pregnant,’ as she has given birth to the ending of this play: ‘all’s well that ends well.’

#### ~ANNE PAGE: THE CONJUNCTION~

Before we even meet Anne Page in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, we are under the impression that she is not physically noteworthy. Sir Hugh Evans, the Welsh Parson, only describes her as being the daughter of Sir George Page and possessing “pretty virginity.” And when Abraham Slender recalls of Anne’s physical appearance, he remembers she has “brown hair, and speaks

small like a woman” (1.1.40-41, marking the only true physical descriptions we have of Anne: she is a virgin, dark-haired, and has a squeaky voice. However, though she may seem nondescript, her dowry is much more exciting to the masculine characters of the scene. Evans tells Slender her late grandfather has promised “seven hundred pounds of moneys, and gold and silver” when she “is able to overtake seventeen years old” (1.1.43-44, 46). So, while Anne may not appear as much, she is worth more than she looks, but this ‘worth’ is conditional in two important ways. For one, it relies on the common understanding that Anne’s dowry will only be rewarded to her future husband on the promise that she is a ‘certified’ virgin. Secondly, Anne’s virgin worth, despite her vague description, seems to rest upon something surprisingly distinct: until she is able to ‘overtake’ the age of seventeen, her grandfather’s money remains out of reach. Hence, why her existence is ‘conditional’; to marry Anne, is to not only possess her, but to possess the wealth she offers through marriage. Obviously, when we look at the text in this fashion, it does not seem like Slender’s subsequent desire to marry her is linked to any particular reason, except that she has a large fortune bound up in her future marriage. As while earlier in the scene, when the men are in discussion about a marriage between him and Anne, Slender quickly changes the course of the conversation:

Evans: It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page.

Slender: Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?

Evans: Ay, and her father is make her a petter penny.

Slender’s sudden divergence from the topic of marriage to that of her dowry implies an awareness (albeit unconscious) of Anne’s conditional state, one formed through masculine wealth—both her grandfather’s seven hundred pounds and her father’s additional ‘petter penny’

(as Evans mistakenly pronounces it). In this way, Anne becomes part of the a virgin binary of the play: masculine wealth/Anne Page.

This language of conditionality and masculine wealth that Slender and the other male characters utilize in 1.1, seems to not only get into the idea of conditions upon virginity, but also how the virgin can fashion herself within those conditions. Not unlike Helen, Anne's form of wealth (and value of her virginity) is contingent upon the death of a 'father figure.' Although we do not see the passing of her grandfather, we have the description of his deathbed by Evans where he gifts the 'future' virgin Anne with seven hundred pounds. It is here that Evans gives us a Warholian unnarrated image of the child, the 'girl,' Anne Page. Therefore, making her textual image confusing. Since we don't actually know how old Anne was upon the death of her grandfather, we have to acknowledge—based on his dying wish—that it was somewhere before she was seventeen. As the young asexual "Nan," while still attached to the sum of her grandfather's wealth, is invariably attached to the identity of her older feminized 'virginity.' It is within this odd crux of time, space, and girlhood, that Shakespeare creates an interesting "hybrid" of Anne: a girl *and* a virgin. This may seem particularly striking in context to how we look at Anne, but it was not entirely uncommon for young girls in the early modern era to be coded both as 'virgins' and as 'girls.' As Higginbotham points out, the development (and therefore, "difference") between the early modern 'girl' from her virgin counterpart was not clearly defined. Even bodily changes, like the start of the menstrual cycle, "[were] neither a rite of passage nor an absolute break with youth."<sup>29</sup> More specifically, the development of female bodies within the early modern era was not seen in explicit stages, but more or less a 'continuous' growth.

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<sup>29</sup> Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*, pg. 12.



Ironically, however, Shakespeare doesn't simply see Anne as part of the 'continuous growth' model, but rather an aberration from it. Anne is not entirely 'gendered.' Like the murky difference between virgins and girls, children—both boys and girls—were not seen as gender-specific. In fact, Higginbotham proposes that it is only within the modern shaping of our language that a nuanced, gendered definition of 'girlhood' versus 'boyhood' has developed.<sup>30</sup> With this in mind, I'd like to return to Slender's recollection of Anne in 1.1 when he says she "speaks small like a woman." The 'small,' womanly soprano voice that Anne seems to possess brings forth both a feminized image of her as the girl-virgin hybrid, but also the androgynous image of the adolescent boy actor playing her. And while drawing on metatheatrics can pose complication, as it has the potential to take some physical grace from the textual representation of the 'virgin,' it seems necessary in understanding how Shakespeare is thinking about Anne. If Anne is to be played by a castrated choir boy, with a 'small voice,' Shakespeare seems to layer her character with the idea of not being entirely one gender. In a sense, we can read this in context to the conditional virginity of Anne: though she exists upon the precedent of masculine-created wealth (masculine wealth/Anne), the unclear boundaries of Anne and her virgin 'girlhood' allow for her to exist within an in-between place that is not always expressible.

This confusing 'in-between' quality about Anne is perhaps what causes Slender (and other characters of the text) to poorly articulate their feelings for her. Slender idly wishes before the dinner party at Master Page's house, "I had rather than forty shillings I had my Book of Songs and Sonnets here" (1.1.165-166). The Norton's footnote writes that Slender is most likely referring to "Richard Tottel's *Miscellany* (1557), an out-of-date collection of love poetry."<sup>31</sup> It makes sense as to why tacky Slender, whose name implies his lack of substance, would yearn for

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<sup>30</sup> Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*, pgs. 20-22.

<sup>31</sup> *The Norton Shakespeare*, pg. 1269.

cliché, out-of-date love poetry to woo Anne. After all, it is the “tried and true” standard. But notice how he sets a price on the idea of ‘wooing’ Anne. While he’d rather have his love poetry, he also wouldn’t mind forty shillings. Again, it is another reference to the masculine wealth/Anne Page binary, but it’s also a way to point to the idea that Anne is not part of a ‘standard’ practice. To put it simply, because she exists within such a complicated physical space, she cannot be confined (and wooed) merely through love poetry. In fact, because Anne exists in such an ‘in-between’ space, perhaps she cannot be defined by the mere expression of speech.

This idea is strengthened further when the other characters of the scene ask Slender if he can love her, and he responds with a fairly convoluted reply:

I will marry her, sir, at your request. But if there be no great love in the beginning, yet heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married and have more occasion to know one another. I hope upon familiarity will grow more contempt. But if you say ‘marry her,’ I will marry her. That I am freely dissolved, and dissolutely (1.1.206-211).

While the gist is that Slender, as Shallow tells us, ‘meant well’ and hopes that a happy marriage can last between him and Anne, one can’t help but think of the relationship between the mistaken, corrupted language that Slender uses and the undefinable virginity of Anne. It’s no coincidence that when Slender struggles to form coherent, rational meaning, he is trying to describe a marriage between himself and Anne. In fact, Slender’s speech is especially amusing as he literally says: if he and Anne don’t love one another at the beginning of their marriage, their love will only decrease the more ‘acquainted’ they become. Though he might have good intention, the inadvertent image he paints with his broken language reveals a future marriage that is plagued by serious misunderstanding, discontent, and a lack of true meaning. With this in mind, Slender’s words about Anne call into question how meaning behind language is created. Is

it made through intention or performance? And perhaps the answer to that question is fairly broad and largely interpretive, but when describing marriage, an act that is sacred and (as Lavatch tells us), ‘redeeming’—shouldn’t the intention (and meaning) be clear behind it? While it’s one thing to express the intent—‘I will marry her’ (as Slender does, very clearly)—it’s another thing to describe the “act” of marriage to her.

In keeping with this, I think Sigurd Burckhardt says it best when he describes “meaning” as “a three-way relation, a correspondence of fact, statement, and understanding...[Therefore, giving] meaning a social dimension.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, meaning is created somewhere in between the exchange of ‘fact,’ ‘statement,’ and ‘understanding,’ which allows for us to see meaning on multiples levels and dimensions. And while Burckhardt’s model is simplistic, I propose it is somewhere between these shades of social meaning that Anne slips through due to her curious status as a girl-virgin. Because there is a lack of language and discourse to describe Anne, she does not fit within a specific nomenclature of female bodies, and as a result, it’s easy for characters like Slender—simplistic and ‘slender’ on substance—to mis-define her.

In addition to Slender’s aforementioned speech, Anne is also the subject of many other ineffable moments within the text. As it’s already been mentioned characters in 1.1, have a hard time describing Anne due to her “girlish” virginity. In 1.4 with the introduction of Mistress Quickly, we find that it’s not simply her hybrid ‘in-betweenness,’ but characters quite literally cannot speak about her without being interrupted. When Mistress Quickly begins to tell Slender’s servant, Simple: “I will do what I can for [Slender]. Anne is a good girl, and I wish—” (1.4.28-29). She is interrupted with the entrance of Rugby alerting Simple and Quickly that their master, Caius—the French doctor—is coming. We don’t get to know what Quickly ‘wishes’ for

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<sup>32</sup> Sigurd Burckhardt, “The King’s Language: Shakespeare’s Drama as Social Discovery,” in *Shakespearean Meanings*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1968, pg. 370.

or what she intended to say because she has been forcibly stopped from articulating discourse about Anne. Understandably, this would be too minor of a detail to discuss if it didn't happen repeatedly. As in that same scene, after Caius has confessed his desire to 'have Anne Page,' he is in the process of leaving with Rugby when Quickly calls: "You shall have Anne—[Caius exits]—ass-head of your own" (1.4.110-111). The humorous, yet didactic nature of this line is dynamic in that it refers yet again to the inexpressible nature of Anne, but also proceeds to pun on the conjunctural nature of her name, 'an.'<sup>33</sup>

After all, the common conjunctural mode of 'an' is to link words together, string phrases along, and to form coherent thoughts in language. However, the OED reports that an older definition, one much more contingent upon the Latin meaning, can come to mean a reference to "tying or binding something, connecting something to another." And while it would be premature to make grand associations based off of mere etymology, because of the conditional description of Anne's virginity and characters' inability to voice their feelings about her, we do get the sense that she is a character who 'links' ideas, thoughts, and plots together. This would explain why Quickly is able to make her corruption of Anne's name into a pun about 'ass-heads.' As it suggests that the connecting, linking nature of Anne's name (and of Anne herself who is subject to in-between spaces) is indicative of the way characters utilize her to get from one place to the next. That also explains why Slender is as interested as he is in Anne Page—marriage (and therefore, 'linkage') with Anne would mean an economic movement into a higher social class. Quite literally, Anne functions as the 'middleman,' or to take up Quickly's tradition: the 'middle an.' Now, with all this discussion of Anne being a middle of sorts—whether as a social conjunction or as a girl-virgin—one has to ask: is she aware of it?

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<sup>33</sup> I know 'an' is an English article, but I use 'conjunction' as a way to speak to Anne's 'in-betweenness.' In terms of being part of this middle space, 'conjunction' serves better because it refers to the idea of stringing phrases together.

We are reminded of Helen and her eagerness to alert us within the first scene of *All's Well* that she is aggressively, uncomfortably aware of her unstable position within the social hierarchy. Shakespeare allows us to see and hear far more from Helen, than from Anne, who—according to the Norton's edition—only appears in three scenes.<sup>34</sup> But when we do see Anne, we see bits and pieces of a cautious, precocious young woman. Our first real, physical image of her emerges at the end of 1.1, when after Slender has unsuccessfully attempted to woo Anne, her father, George Page, appears and asks Slender to come in and enjoy the dinner party. Slender remains robust in his desire to not eat anything and Page insists—"You shall not choose, sir"—Slender agrees, but only if "Anne,[herself] shall go first." Anne, knowing Slender is a guest in her father's house and a man of reputation, rejects this idea, which causes Slender to insist: "Truly, I will not go first, truly, la. I will not do you that wrong." Again, Anne rejects him, and finally Slender concedes: "I'll rather be unmannerly than troublesome. You do yourself wrong, indeed, la" (1.1.152-153). This scene is worth looking at for a number of reasons. For one, it shows the clunky and awkward nature of Slender's art of seduction, but more importantly, it shows Anne's deeper consciousness of her middleclass status, and therefore, an awareness of proper etiquette. Her rejection to precede him into the house could then be read both as an awareness of her 'self' and her physical body.

While we can acknowledge that her awareness of her own physical space is important, it is not the same as awareness of her virginity. In fact, Anne does not allow us to peak into her virgin consciousness until much later into the play in 3.4. The scene opens with her and Fenton—the boy she desires to marry—discussing an apparent plan to marry one another, despite the wishes of Anne's parents. Fenton admits he originally wooed her due to her father's wealth

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<sup>34</sup> The Norton relies on the Folio's edition, but the Quarto editions may confuse this.

(masculine wealth/Anne Page), he quickly found she was of “more value / Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags” (3.4.15-16). And as admirable as that is, it is still an indication of her binate association with masculine wealth. However, Anne seems to find his confession meaningful as she tells him, while exhibiting clear and unobstructed consciousness of what she wants: “seek my father’s love, still seek it, sir. / If opportunity and humblest suit / Cannot attain it, why then—” (3.4.19-21). Anne is coincidentally cut-off with the entrance of none other than a ‘richly-dressed’ Slender, Justice Shallow, and Mistress Quickly. She draws Fenton away, as the stage direction—in the Folio—indicates they ‘talk apart’ and away from the group. The stage direction itself is important as it implies a complicit quality between Anne and Fenton, as that is obviously how the two have been consorting with one another. Drawn away from the group, but usually within the protected ‘unscene unnarrated’ spaces of the text. This scene also allows for us to see a delightfully cynic image of the bright-minded Anne Page, who can teasingly tell Shallow to let Slender ‘woo’ her for himself, while at the same time, contemplates how she would “rather be set quick i’t’h earth and bowled to death with turnips” (3.4.84-85),” then marry Caius or Slender (her mother and her father’s chosen marital suitors, respectively). So, while she might not be frequently seen or heard, this definitely exhibits the idea that Anne has a mind of her own.

From this simple, yet quirky line of wit, it’s easy to see that Anne does possess a consciousness about her virginity. To understand how she ‘fashions’ to use this consciousness, I turn back to Garber and Warhol. Obviously, we do not have a lot of physical dialogue from Anne, partially due to the fact that she and her suitors exist in the subplot of the play, but also because being ‘unnarrated’ for Anne is a form of active resistance against the marriage her parents desperately desire. Suspended in the invisibility of the ‘unscene unnarrative,’ Anne is granted the ability to freely act of her own will. In a sense, she can do whatever she wants, and

she knows it, because no one's *watching*—not even the audience. This becomes clear in 4.6 when Fenton, who meets with the Host of the Garter, has a letter written by Anne that plots out the remaining events of the play. This entails the Merry Wives' infamous 'Herne plot,' as well as the one where she and Fenton escape to be married unbeknownst to her parents (and their chosen suitors). As Fenton explains to the host, he and Anne will be able to slip away—while choir boy surrogates will stand-in for her, dressed in both green and white (the coded colors selected for her suitors, Caius and Slender)—and be married by a vicar at the church. These two plots—the Herne ceremony and the suitors taking Anne off to be married—are both unified in that they involve Anne, but because she is invisible, undefinable, and unspeakable, she has the ability to 'fashion' a 'third' plot—one that we (the audience) do not see, but we can acknowledge it happens because she *wrote* it down. Ironically, while Fenton is the one who enacts the plot by meeting with the Host, it is Anne who 'writes the ending' of the play. And perhaps her last name 'page' is indicative of this, as while she is the conjunction—the 'link' between social classes—she is also the blank 'page' on which the play (and all its plots) are inscribed upon and united as one 'act.'

To further the point that Anne acknowledges her invisibility, when she and Fenton *do* slip out unseen in 5.5, it isn't until the very end, that the other characters notice Anne has gone and tricked them all. This makes sense when we think back to Helen and the way a lack of textual representation allowed for her to move as easily as she did throughout the text. Perhaps for Anne—and her undefinable hybrid virginity—it is even easier, as she demonstrates an ability to be 'both' at once. With no restriction to how she can exist within the text, Anne is free to be both. She can deceive *both* of her parents, she can be *both* virgin and girl, and most importantly, she can be *both* "merry and yet, honest, too" (4.2.89). As her mother and Mistress Ford

demonstrated, within the main plot of the play, wives can misbehave, be inconstant, and at times, unreliable, but they can also be ‘honest,’ chaste, and ultimately, well-intentioned. When Anne returns in 5.5, married, but still a virgin, she has become the literal manifestation of her mother’s words: she has deceived them all in her unseen ‘merriness,’ but she still remains ‘honest’ too.

From this perspective, Anne does not lose her ‘in-between’ hybrid nature of being a girl-virgin, but rather becomes a new form of hybridity: the wife-virgin. And while it is a temporary one (as eventually, her and Fenton will have to consummate their marriage), it is a new and unexplored space that allows for Anne to be a ‘link’ between the ‘three’ plots of the play. And that’s exactly what she does, as while the main plot of the play revolves around the Merry Wives scheming up a way to get back at Sir John Falstaff for attempting to take advantage of them, Anne and her suitors are mostly the ‘subplot,’ while the marriage between her and Fenton functions as the ‘third’ (and “meta” plot). But there is a semblance, right? Conflict originally arises between Falstaff and the Wives, because they both receive identical love letters from him. Like Slender wanting to woo Anne with his tacky love poems, Falstaff attempts to confine the Wives to a page, not willing to figure out the true distinction between them. But Anne is not afraid of being ‘confined’ to a page—she is a virgin ‘page.’ One that is not defined because she is both a girl and a virgin, one that *cannot* be explicitly defined (as Slender and Quickly demonstrate), and one that is blank and open to her disposal.



~ROSALIND: THE TEACHER~

As Anne and Helen have shown us, virginity is a chaotic, complicated space that can enable social movement, blur class distinction, and call into question the norms of physical feminine bodies. Virginity is a contradiction. On the one hand, it is meant to be kept in order for the virgin to preserve her ‘honesty,’ but everything is contingent upon her losing it within the act of consummation. In the last play of my study, *As You Like It*, Shakespeare seems especially aware of this contradiction. Likewise, this section examines how the virgin function within the plot. Rosalind—the “characteristic” virgin of the play—cannot only be seen as a grand accumulation of all of these traits within virginity; she is also a space Shakespeare uses to explore virgin contradiction with *another* contradiction: Renaissance cross-dressing. By utilizing her contradictory identity, Ganymede, Rosalind uses speech as a means to recreate, reimagine, and re-‘fashion’ not only herself, but other characters ‘as she likes.’

While Anne might have kept us in suspense about whether or not she was conscious of her virginity, Rosalind, much more like Helen, doesn’t keep us guessing. When we meet her in 1.2, she is telling her cousin Celia, “Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure” (1.2.3-5). Rosalind sees herself as predicated—like her fellow virgin sisters—upon the conditions of an absent paternal figure. While Helen forgot her social perception due to the death of her father, Rosalind—whose father is not dead, but banished—*cannot* forget her social placement as a member of the middling class. As while Rosalind is the daughter of a Duke, it is due to his exile, that she is severed from her father and the class distinction that goes with him. In other words, Rosalind seems to be the inverse of Helen: while the death of Helen’s father forces her to forget her social distinction,

Rosalind's father's absence encourages her to be overly-aware of her social placement within such a high class. From the first five lines of Rosalind's speech, we can establish she sees herself as a social contradiction, existing on a line between being what she once was—the daughter of a duke, the Duke Senior—and the titleless entity she has become. In this way, while it is partly due to this cusped existence on two social planes that Rosalind is capable of movement and dynamic self-fashioning, it is also due to her influential ability to speak.

Her agency does not simply come from a matter of acknowledging her social inadequacy, but also her command over language. Rosalind's speech is a force. She has the most spoken lines out of all the play's characters and out of all of Shakespeare's heroines. With this in mind, it is the dominant presence of her voice that also gives Rosalind the ability to take language away from others. This happens with Orlando who is rendered speechless at the sight of her. After Rosalind has given him her necklace for winning the wrestling match against Charles, he remarks incredulously in an aside, "My better parts / Are all thrown down, and that which here stands up / Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block" (1.2.215-217). In other words, his surprise over the gift of her favor has 'thrown down' his speech and made him into a post of 'lifeless' wood. Shortly thereafter, there's a strange moment where it seems as if Orlando may call back to Rosalind, as she turns back and asks if 'he called her,' but Orlando does not respond before Celia and Rosalind make their exit. It is only once our favorite cross-dresser leaves the scene that Orlando admits exasperatedly: "What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue? I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference" (1.2.224-225). From just this short interaction, Orlando seems to be struck by her speech. He describes it as being 'weighted,' as if her vocalization holds his tongue from articulating words.

This is the same idea we get from Celia when she describes Rosalind's words as "too precious to be cast away upon curs / Throw some of them at me. Come, lame me with reasons" (1.3.4-5). Celia's analogy is interesting as it hardens the idea that Rosalind's speech is a type of substance, something that is both edible (as it can't be used to feed mangy 'curs') and strikingly physical. Celia also seems to have an innate desire to be abused by her cousin's words, to be 'struck lame' and 'beaten' by her verbalization. And though Celia may be gracious towards her cousin's use of speech, masculine nobility like Celia's father, the Duke Frederick, is threatened. He warns his daughter, "She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience, / Speak to the people, and they pity her" (1.3.71-73). It is here that Frederick describes the dangerous social contradiction of Rosalind. Frederick seems to see this breaching of social class as an invading presence. While Helen and Anne have both been born into their 'middling' class, Rosalind originally hailed from affluent society, which makes her especially dangerous. Now that she is of a lower class, her speech gives her the ability to reach across the divide between class distinction and 'speak to the people.'

This idea of 'speaking to the people' is physically manifested when Rosalind dons her cross-dressed identity of Ganymede. As described above, if Rosalind's speech has a 'physical' quality to it, the way she describes herself as Ganymede—"we'll have a swashing and martial outside, / As many other mannish cowards have, [and a] hidden woman's fear" (1.3. 114-115, 113)—projects her speech onto a physical body that is created by way of her verbalization. In simpler terms, by wearing the cross-dressed guise of the Ganymede—an undefinable, yet somewhat masculine identity—we see the very *real* way Rosalind lives from a space that 'speaks' to all. But it's worth noting, we don't actually see the act of Rosalind 'becoming' Ganymede or even how she intends to do it. Celia, at least, describes the process of 'smirching'

her face with umber. Warhol would call this event a “antinarration,” which she defines as an untold event within the text that “shouldn’t be told because it breaks social convention.”<sup>35</sup> In not revealing how Rosalind intends to make herself into Ganymede, Shakespeare complicates how we read the sociality of formal gender roles. Does one simply have to put on a ‘hose’ and a ‘doublet’ to become a ‘male’? And if that’s the case—what happens to Rosalind’s virgin identity, if she is usurped by a male one?

And these questions are oddly appropriate in a space like Ardenne Forest—a place that defies socio-formal convention. It’s what Charles Forker called ‘the green world’ of Shakespearean drama in which ideas of contradiction and informality can be explored through “action that is not ordinarily seen.”<sup>36</sup> These worlds usually take place within a forest—as in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*—as nature allows us to question the in-between spaces of our reality due to it being such a “simple and unassuming space.”<sup>37</sup> This would explain why both Rosalind and Celia feel as if they can explore the social boundaries of this new world within their alter egos. From the start of the scene in 2.4, when we first see Rosalind and Celia, we know that they are physically disguised—as Rosalind is self-conscious about “disgrace[ing her] man’s apparel” by “cry[ing] like a woman” (2.3.3-4). And this is particularly noticeable as in the time since we have last seen our favorite cross-dressed virgin, she has not only ‘changed’ into Ganymede, but she has laid down makeshift rules for proper masculine etiquette: men don’t cry, women do. At this, we are reminded of the questions originally posed by Shakespeare—what is the notion of gender norms? And how does Rosalind’s virginity tie into it? Judith Butler famously argued (by utilizing Luce Irigaray), the ‘female’ is “multiple...[in the sense that] they constitute the

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<sup>35</sup> Warhol, “Neonarration,” pg. 224.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Forker, “The Green World of Early Shakespearean Tragedy,” *Shakespeare Studies*, no. 17 (1985): pg. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Forker, “The Green World,” pg. 44.

unconstrainable undesignatable...mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, by establishing that “femininity”<sup>39</sup> is tied into the gender norms of ‘phallogocentric’ society, the ‘feminine’ cannot truly exist or, for that matter, be ‘truly’ defined. But Rosalind is the epic example of a female who exists within a ‘phallogocentric economy,’ because while she is Ganymede, she is still herself, the virgin. It follows then that Shakespeare seems to create the ultimate binary of virgin/man because it was Rosalind who devised of the masculine Ganymede and therefore, *became* him. Her questioning of the ‘role’ of gender shows that she acknowledges there is a very real gap of social difference she has crossed, conquered, and has re-‘fashioned.’

However, one has to remember, this is a very modern critique of Rosalind, but it’s not far from what Shakespeare (and fellow contemporaries) might have believed. Margaret Beckman within her article “The Figure of Rosalind In *As You Like It*”<sup>40</sup> argues that “opposites within Renaissance literature were often balanced, if not ‘yoked,’ together to form a ‘new concoction.’” In other words, the Rosalind/Ganymede figure is not disproportioned in ‘one’ gender, but rather an entirely new virgin entity within the play. One that, like Butler argued, could flourish within her newly ‘concocted’ masculine identity. In a sense, Rosalind then becomes another contradiction, she can be both a feminine virgin and a masculine youth. This adds a new intersectional dimension to Rosalind’s contradictory nature. Because while we can acknowledge that Ganymede is the manifestation of her ability to breach class divide through ‘speech,’ ‘he’ is now a new way for her to rupture gender norms and ‘fashion’ herself within this new contradiction.

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990): pg. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Use that word loosely—she was from the 90s.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Beckman, “The Figure of Rosalind In *As You Like It*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 1, no. 29 (1978): pg. 45.

Moreover, it's not only social-sexual contradictions that are being 'reconciled' within Rosalind, but also long-held tropes about romantic love. As Beckman writes (utilizing C.L. Barber's quotation), "'romantic participation in love and humorous detachment from its follies'" is at play as "the two polar attitudes [about love] are balanced against each other in the action as a whole, meet and are reconciled in Rosalind's personality."<sup>41</sup> In this way, while Rosalind is able to resolve and overcome feminine-masculine differences, she also occupies a space in which the so-called 'polar-attitudes' about romantic love and its 'follies' become humorous by means of her cross-dressing. Humor, within Shakespeare, is an important way to reconcile social difference (i.e., the high-minded monarch humbled by the clown). Perhaps this is why in 3.2, right before Ganymede and Orlando meet, Rosalind decides she will speak to Orlando "like a saucy lackey, and under the habit play the knave with him" (3.2.269-270). In other words, while Rosalind wants to "fool around" with Orlando, the manner that she chooses to perform is interesting. As by speaking like a 'lackey' and 'playing the knave,' Rosalind makes reference to principals that merge onto those that David Wiles outlines as traits of the Shakespearean clown:

- 1) The clown part belongs to a male character of low social class
- 2) The clown's part is written in colloquial prose
- 3) The clown is free to separate himself from the role and plot structure of the play and to improvise as he pleases.<sup>42</sup>

When applied to Rosalind's Ganymede, it's not impossible to imagine 'him' as a clownish figure, especially when it comes to 'his' interactions with Orlando. Likewise, Ganymede technically belongs to a low social class—though 'he' owns a cottage, 'he' is also a shepherd—and 'he' largely speaks in colloquial prose (there are only a few instances with the shepherdess, Phoebe, when Ganymede slips into verse). More importantly, however, by being placed within

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<sup>41</sup> Beckman, "The Figure of Rosalind," pg. 45.

<sup>42</sup> David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown and Text In the Elizabethan Playhouse*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pg. 10.

the Forest of Ardenne, Rosalind's cross-dressed Ganymede is free to separate 'himself' from the role of the play and improvise as 'he' pleases. Inevitably, the method of the clown's 'improvisation' is based on their capability of speech, which is meant to "test the limits of a character's wit."<sup>43</sup> Fortunately for us, Rosalind, with her fluent affinity for words, is the perfect 'fool' to test the 'limits' of wit and the divides of social-sexual difference.

With this in mind, while Greenblatt's 'self-fashioning' has been present in the play—as Ganymede is more or less a 'fashioned' identity of Rosalind's—it is within this moment that we become aware of how Rosalind will demonstrate virgin-fashioning of others. Greenblatt, too, has an idea about a character's ability to 'improvise' through speech, when he says, that "by taking another's truth as an ideological construct," one can "reform an uneven semblance" of that 'truth' through a matter of 'performance.'<sup>44</sup> In other words, by forcing Orlando to call 'him' "Rosalind," Ganymede is acquiring the 'uneven semblance' of Rosalind, without actually being the 'true' Rosalind. The space of 'uneven semblance' is where Greenblatt posits the disposition as to *how* one can become separated from their own truth and accept fashioning onto themselves. Orlando—despite acknowledging that Ganymede is not the 'real' Rosalind: "I take some joy to say you are" (4.1.77)—still accepts 'him' as a valid stand-in. Hence, why Rosalind is using an aggressive form of virgin-fashioning, as by recreating a similar, yet opposing image of herself within the cross-dressed identity of Ganymede, she can 'fashion' Orlando as the suitor she desires. This is why she tells him in 3.2, the 'cure' to love is found within the comical madness of contradiction:

At which-time would I being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something, and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour—would now like him; loathe him; then

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<sup>43</sup> Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, pg. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, pg. 228.

entertain him, then forswear him; now weep for him, then spit at him, that I drave my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness (3.3.365-374).

The suitor Rosalind is describing was cured of his lovesickness by an absolute chaotic cycle of fashioning. Ganymede would open the suitor up to fashioning with affection through ‘longing and liking,’ only to be shoved away by Ganymede’s inconstancy and ‘changeable’ passions. Thus, taking the suitor from one form of mad humor—that of love—to the humor of madness. Likewise, Ganymede offers to perform his ‘contradictory cure’ on Orlando, if he will open himself up to fashioning, by accepting to call Ganymede ‘Rosalind.’ A cure which he willingly accepts ‘with all his heart.’

Now, is this type of ‘fashioned’ cure actually going to work on Orlando? Orlando—unlike Rosalind—seeks after permanence in love, a cure for his heavy heart. It doesn’t seem like ‘inconstancy’ and instability are in the works for him. He is expected to exist, as Rosalind does, in the intermediate space of two opposing natures: what he knows of the ‘real’ Rosalind and the ‘fashioned’ identity that Ganymede impersonates. Beckman suggests this is why he carves verses about Rosalind into the trees of Ardenne Forest, not to make the “love-gestures... as his *raison d’etre*, but as an aberration” onto something that has purpose and meaning on its own.<sup>45</sup> As a man that does not have a solid center—as Rosalind does within her virginity—Orlando becomes prey to Rosalind ‘fashioning.’ She instructs him, throughout the play, to show up on time, kiss a maiden the right way, and never expect a woman’s temperance and will to be ‘constant.’ Rather, according to Ganymede, within his proposed relationship with Rosalind, he should expect nothing but social contradiction: “I will weep for nothing ... and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry. I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep” (4.1.130-133). But Orlando—not being of the same caliber as his lover’s contradictory

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<sup>45</sup> Beckman, “The Figure of Rosalind,” pg. 45.



existence—cannot “live no longer by thinking” (5.2.45). In other words, social-sexual contradiction for Orlando isn’t a medium that he can ground himself in. And even if he could, it’s not as if he has much to be *grounded* in. Hence, the danger Greenblatt mentions of self-fashioning, as by opening himself to Rosalind’s virgin-fashioning, he “empties” himself, and, as a result, is “filled” with her speech.

No scene is more indicative of the effects of fashioning than in 5.2 when Rosalind is confronted with all the ‘lovers’ of the play. This scene is particularly amusing because it is a culmination of all the people Rosalind has fashioned demanding a resolution to their resultant problems. As we know, Phoebe is in love with Rosalind’s Ganymede, Silvius is in love with Phoebe, Orlando is in love with Rosalind, and Rosalind is dressed as Ganymede (which could also be seen as a fashioned relationship of sorts). Although each of these relationships should be looked at individually as they pose their own spaces of question and interest, they are all reliant on Rosalind to undo the social-sexual contradiction she has tied them into. If Ganymede remains, then Phoebe will always love ‘him,’ if Phoebe always loves Ganymede, then Silvius will always pine after Phoebe, and Orlando will forever be caught within the contradiction of Ganymede. It sounds ridiculous, but Silvius manages to describe the effects of this contradiction best when he laments, “It is to be all made of fantasy / All made of passion, and all made of wishes, / All adoration, duty, and observance, / All humbleness, all patience and impatience, / All purity, all trial, all obedience” (5.2.84-88). While Rosalind’s virginity is what allows for her to stay grounded within Ganymede’s chaotic space of social-sexual contradiction, the other characters—as a result of her virgin-fashioning—have been forced to endure an all-encompassing ‘fantasy’ of liminal space that has no real boundary. By the end of the scene, it’s clear she acknowledges that

she has to undo Ganymede (and the contradiction of ‘him’), to get rid of the liminal space ‘he’ has created.

In the last scene of 5.4, when Rosalind reappears as herself, the female virgin, she seemingly gives up her position as the tutor of Orlando, the wooer of Phoebe, and thus, the rival of Silvius, as everything falls into place. She assimilates herself back into the play—addressing her father, Orlando, and Phoebe: “I’ll have no father if you be not he. / I’ll have no husband if you be not he. / Nor ne’er wed woman if you be not she” (5.4.111-113). But her full rehabilitation into the social structure of the play cannot be resolved until she is married. That explains why she must enter with Hymen—the Greek god of marriage—who brings the message that “there [is] mirth in heaven / When earthly things made even / Atone together” (5.4.97-99). In other words, now that Rosalind is back to who she truly is—a virgin—all the marriages can happen. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Rosalind no longer has the power of the play, even though she is handing in her ‘doublet and hose.’ As while Ganymede complicated the contradiction of Rosalind, her true power came from her command over language. Her language creates, destroys, improvises, interjects, interrupts, but most importantly, it has the capability to fashion those around her in just the way she likes them.

~CONCLUSION~

Throughout the three plays I have studied, it seems as if there have been three main points of similarity between each of these virgin girls. Firstly, *absence of a paternal figure initiates uncomfortable social positioning*. When Helen first enters in *All's Well That Ends Well*, we learn two things: her father has died and she has “forgotten” him. But the more we learn of Helen, the more we understand she has not ‘forgotten’ the physical memory of her father, but rather his social positioning. Due to a lack of paternal anchoring to remind her of her class status, Helen finds herself able to shift through social layering to marry the man she wants. Likewise, Anne Page, with her attachment to her grandfather’s dying wish, allows us to see her as the hybrid—one that is able to be both ‘girl’ and ‘virgin.’ It is also this unique ‘betweenness’ about Anne that allows for her to serve as a ‘conjunction’ between plots, people, and social class. Conversely, unlike Helen and Anne, Rosalind—who was born into high society due to her father’s status as a duke—is brought down in social value when her father is exiled from the

court. His absence is what creates this social contradiction for Rosalind, one that she can more easily explore with her father ‘offstage.’ With this in mind, it does seem like fathers hold their virgin daughters ‘back,’ but once they are removed from the play, Helen, Anne, and Rosalind are free to shift throughout the play as they please.

Secondly, *virgin consciousness leads to virgin-fashioning*. When Helen realizes she exists within her own social sphere as a result of her father’s death, she is able to recognize that social classes no longer restrict her from being with the man she loves. In fact, the recognition that Helen can slip through the social hierarchy of the play—occasionally subsuming a masculine role here and there—is ultimately how she fashions her version of the virgin/man binary. As we know, it is in healing the King—obviously, part of her plan to marry Bertram—that Helen is able to breach the highest levels of society and as a result, shift the placement and agency of virgins in the play. Furthermore, Anne Page, who tells us she would rather be buried alive and bowled with turnips, than have to marry her parents’ chosen suitors, is clearly aware that she is a desired virgin entity. Although we don’t see nearly enough of her to know the full extent of her consciousness, we do know that Anne sees herself as a ‘link’ within plots. As she sends Fenton a letter that details the ins-and-outs of her plan to marry him, by fashioning a third, but conjunctural plot that will play alongside (and outside of) those of her parents and the Merry Wives. And finally, Rosalind’s consciousness is detected within her desire to ‘forget’ her father, which would allow for her to forget his social class, and therefore, no longer be a social contradiction. But even if that was the case, Rosalind’s method of fashioning does not span from her ability to forget, but rather from her ability to speak. In fact, Ganymede is a prime example of a self-fashioned identity as Rosalind created ‘him’ through speech. It is also through speech (and Greenblatt’s much more assertive ‘improvisation’), that Rosalind is able to fashion large

parts of Orlando out and make him into the man she desires. And it is here that I rest my conclusion: virgin consciousness—while it does determine a virgin’s ability to fashion—manifests in different ways, sometimes it is detectable and visible as with Helen and Rosalind, but other times, consciousness can be private and unseen as is the case with Anne.

Thirdly, *marriage does not imply the relinquishment of agency*. None of the plays I looked at ended in ways that left me disappointed with how the virgin followed through on the virgin/man binary. For instance, *All’s Well That Ends Well* closes with Helen both consummated and pregnant with Bertram’s child. As one can recall, these were both conditions set down by Bertram in order to bar Helen from ever truly being his ‘wife.’ So, while she may have married him, Helen still possesses the power *over* his heir, as it was her who planned, fashioned, and ensured that she would conceive of Bertram’s son in the way she wanted. Thus, Helen has reimagined the future dynasties of Bertram’s line and subsumed the ‘masculine legacy’ onto herself. That doesn’t exactly sound like she’s relinquishing her agency. And not unlike Helen, Anne Page, at the end of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, reappears as the new wife of Fenton. But as we know, Anne has not yet consummated her marriage to Fenton and still remains as a hybrid: the wife-virgin. Simply by the logic of Jankowski’s binaries, Anne doesn’t fit into one, she never has. That’s not a bad thing. Anne functions best when she cannot be defined or articulated (as Slender and Quickly demonstrate). Therefore, she is free to move without textual restraint through both the ‘unscene unnarrative’ and the ‘scene narrative.’ The ending implies that, while Anne won’t be a virgin forever, she is still a hybrid and will always bear that unique ‘in-betweenness.’ In fact, Rosalind (as surprising as that is), in the end of *As You Like It*, might be the one to come closest to ‘relinquishing’ her agency. She undoes the social-sexual contradiction posed by Ganymede, she assimilates herself back into the play text, and literally appears with

Hymen to have all the marriages happen as they should. However, the ending of the play isn't the last we see of Rosalind. In the Folio version of the text, she reappears in the epilogue, 'charging' the audience to "like as much of this play as please you." And knowing what we do about Rosalind's speech, perhaps the epilogue implies that even when the play is over, the virgin's ability to reach us will go beyond the text of the play.